

## WHY I'M A CHRISTIAN

I'm a Christian. I don't know what kind of connotation that evokes in you, but I think it will be worth hearing my explanation of why I'm a Christian. I'd like you to know how my personal research, reasoning and meditations have led me to these conclusions. I'm attempting to present a non-threatening explanation which is, of course, my viewpoint. At the outset, I appeal to your reasonableness to hear, without prejudgment, a simple explanation that I feel is compelling.

First, realize there are more than a billion people now living claiming to be Christian. Probably no two would explain in exactly the same way what it means to be a Christian. That's because every one of us has had a different life experience and a different perspective. However, there are at least three ideas that are both minimally acceptable to all that are Christians and that may be unique to Christianity. These three ideas are the only three I'd like to discuss. Christians all believe there is a higher power that most picture as a personage, a 'God', if you will. They also believe that Jesus as the son of God gave up his life as a sacrifice to benefit all those that avail themselves of his magnanimity. Finally, they all recognize the obligation to show love to others.

All I want to do is analyze these three ideas. I beg you not to go ahead of me. There is a wide latitude even within those three issues. For example, I know committed Christians who live as close to the concept of sainthood as you could imagine, but whose views and picture of God are diametrically different, anywhere between viewing God as the wizard in the Wizard of Oz, a little old man who sits behind a giant computer screen and a conglomeration of buttons and knobs keeping order in the universe to the other extreme of God being a hardly a person as we would normally define a person.

Some Christians see God as a spiritual force found anywhere and everywhere in creation, a person, yes, in the sense of intelligence, feeling and goal-orientation. Christian views run the gamut between those extremes. Let's not debate these fine points now, that's a life's project in itself. Let's just understand the basics of the three issues Christianity asserts as true, an eternal God or "Mighty One" as the original language of Christian scripture asserts. Christianity asserts that Jesus is the Son of God whose mandate was to die for all who might and will ever need the sacrifice to give you the psychological courage to go on (and there will come a time when you will need that help). Finally, Christianity asserts that the only way you'll be truly happy is to come to the point where you can put others' interests before your welfare. In other words, show "love" to others following the example Jesus set. That's all I'm asking you to consider with me.

### WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "GOD?"

I remember when I was just a young kid interested in science. I loved reading about space, physics and astronomy. I remember so well almost every book I

picked up on the subject in the late 60's and early 70's had a question or two about the debate going on among astronomers. Did the universe have a beginning, the Big Bang Theory or was the universe always in existence, the Steady-State Theory. I recall at the time thinking this was such an interesting issue since it brought the theologians into the debate whether they liked it or not. Christianity and the Bible are both very adamant on the topic asserting the universe had a beginning, the first words of the Bible being, "In the beginning..." I listened attentively over the next few years to the debate and the attendant research that was given to support a particular viewpoint. This continued for a number of years until Stephen Hawking and others were able to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the universe did have a beginning. I remember thinking to myself, with little fanfare, "Well, score one for Christianity."

A similar phenomenon is presently unfolding in the field of biology. Scientists, and not just Christian scientists, are using the phrase "Intelligent Design" to describe the incredible complexity of living cells. Many biologists are beginning to admit that it is difficult to have faith in evolution as creator of life without the concurrent belief in a guiding force. Scientific evidence has failed to support the claim that random mutation and natural selection can create new life forms. To date no examples or evidence of new species evolving either by chance or in optimum laboratory conditions have been discovered. Natural selection may cause a population of moths to change color as their environment changes. But that is far from proving that the same process could eventually turn one species of fish to a new species. Natural selection has shown no creative power and only produces minor shifts in populations. Many persons confronted with the paucity of proof of blind, unguided evolution admit it takes more faith to believe in evolution than to believe in an intelligent designing force. I am not intending on providing a complete study of evolution vs design, there are many books the reader can obtain at any library for an exhaustive study. I am only suggesting that if 150 years of scientific study of evolution can not produce evidence of unaided species change or even species change with perfect laboratory conditions, blind faith is the sole basis for unintelligent design. I encourage you to read further on the topic if more evidence is needed, as I did when I first started searching.

About the same time as I was contemplating the evidence for a higher power from physical science, I was beginning my studies in psychology and sociology. I found to my bewilderment hot debates over other issues that were in some way connected to Christianity, issues where Christianity had a vested interest in seeing resolved. Issues, such as family values, were of major concern. Many of my mentors in sociology were suggesting that Family, a traditional societal norm, would soon be a thing of the past. They were certain that research would soon show that traditional family settings were not necessary or would have no affect on success of raising children. I remember when a well-known sociologist was all but boycotted and pilloried for having the audacity to print his research showing one of the major contributors to the growing disenfranchisement of inner

city populations was the startling increase of single parent families in those inner cities. This was the first time I heard the term, “politically incorrect” and was indignant to find that the powers that be would not allow data and research on this branch of family studies to be published in reputable academic journals. It was too volatile a topic. Eventually, as other research and data over the next decade would trickle in, it became very clear to all that a traditional family environment was by far the most successful venue for providing well-adjusted, productive members of society. Though many sociologists objected, stating the data only proves that the traditional family is still the most successful means of socializing children but that it did not prove it is the only means. To date, these objectors have not suggested an alternative that has long-term data to recommend its veracity. Again, though it took 10 or 15 years for this positive family data to surface, I said to myself with little fanfare, “Another point for Christianity!”

Time after time I found that my fields of study (sociology and psychology) had published tomes of data indirectly verifying that Christian principles have a place in our modern world. Here I mention just one example. A field of particular interest in my research has been self-help psychology. I have been around to observe the ebb and flow of the popularity of the field. The basic thread running through all the research and volumes on this topic is the importance of using the conscious and subconscious mind to effect change in a person’s self and the world around him or her. Whether the advice is on imaging or goal setting or the current fad, especially in business, of using intuition to usher in success, these data which include both rigorous scientific studies and also compelling anecdotal data confirms the Christian principle of the power of the mind. Writers will often quote the much-repeated Biblical assertion, “As a man thinketh so shall it come to pass for him.....” and other biblical aphorisms on the power of the mind, usually without giving any credit to the original source of the profound ideas. The discoveries of these principles associated with healthy, successful living are extolled with no reference to any antecedent Christian source. Again, as the data came in I have simply mused, “Another point on the side for the veracity of Christianity!”

My thesis now becomes, with study after study confirming Christian principles of living time after time and with no known actual proof of error in the Christian philosophy in 2000 years let alone the last 50 years, I have to conclude that the probability of the stability of Christian values being relevant, into the future is very high. The probability of another system of living proving to be credible is slim. Only recently I was sitting in a research seminar when several sociologists who were not Christians were reporting on the results of studies on non-localized prayer, the evidence showing that prayer by Christians, even when the person being prayed for doesn’t realize someone is praying for him, will have a statistically significant effect on his recovery. If time after time, the group of subjects being prayed for (without them or the doctors and nursing staff even knowing prayer is being used) show a statistically significant favorable recovery

compared to the non-prayed for group, there is no other known explanation for this. The only possible interpretation is that there are powers beyond physical powers allowed for in a purely material world. When some in the audience became indignant that the data was being reported, the researcher responded, "Don't blame me, I'm just repeating the results. I'm as surprised as you are with the results. I can't explain it, but my ethics force me to report the facts." Rather than immediately objecting to data because the results tend to support Christian doctrine, I feel any seeker of truth would conclude that this is another case where Christianity has an uncanny record of having its claims verified by scientific studies. I've had to admit the further we venture into a scientific world, the evidence piles up to support Christian principles. In every case I've researched of discrepant assertions, it's always based on heresay or taking statements from the Bible out of context. Rationally, I have been led to admit the Christian principles of living are true and since the source claims to be that of a higher power, I can find no rational reason to refute the claim. This, of course, is not absolute proof but that in fact is what Christian Biblical writings dare us to do, "Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty..." (Malachi 3:10 in the Bible). There is always a necessity for faith. Belief in any philosophy requires faith but when evidence repeatedly piles up to confirm the assertions of Christian faith, I have found the initial need for faith to be the most reasonable conclusion.

So when I read that Christianity is based on the idea that there is a higher power who created the universe "in the beginning" and he chose to provide tenets for living that have stood the test of time and vigorous research by our scientific community, I marvel and am humbled to admit the evidence points to there being a higher power or God as Christianity claims. I accept this on faith just as any secular religion like communism, atheism or agnosticism requires acceptance on faith. I, at least, have reams of data and research to point to that has led me in the direction of the Christian faith.

As I have lived as a Christian I have been amazed to find (though I shouldn't be amazed) that the experiences and successes of my personal life and my personal walk with the God that I originally had to accept based on faith, has been confirmed. Again you'll say, "Well, that's your personal interpretation", and I have to admit, "Yes, it is." But I would appeal to you by asking, why it is that the vast majority (scientific probability, again) of people who take the 'leap of faith' that the nineteenth century philosopher Kierkegaard recommended have overwhelmingly testified it has worked in their lives.? They have gotten personal evidence, personal experience that occurs in their lives too often to explain away as chance, continually confirming there is a God and that he cares about us.

So that's why I have faith in the God of Christianity. Again, who this God is, what type of entity He is, can be interpreted in many different ways by different Christian groups. But there is a Higher Power. Let's not get bogged down on semantic terms like "all powerful, all knowing" when you as a neophyte Christian

can accept the minimal belief in a God, a higher power, existing before the beginning, as reasonably evident.

## **JESUS' SACRIFICE**

The major assertion that separates Christians from other religious or spiritual seekers is the belief that Jesus gave up his life as a sacrifice for the benefit of all who believe in him. My purpose here is not to discuss the issue from a theological standpoint but merely from a logical view. This is a rather esoteric concept and may, for some, require further Biblical references. My goal here is to pass on the excitement I feel that modern scientific research is proving the value of this Christian doctrine.

The issue here is the issue of forgiveness. In my studies and work in the field of social psychology, I frequently encounter the necessity for personal forgiveness. Fortunately, modern psychology has produced an avalanche of data demonstrating that individuals have a difficult time coping with relationships and attaining personal self-esteem without being able to forgive others or themselves for past transgressions. We now understand that an individual may not be able to grow emotionally and in self-concept if he is stifled by an inability to forgive others or self. Countless studies show that an individual may have every right to disparage and castigate another for a heinous offense against himself but if he is not able to go beyond that hatred of the other without being able to move on, he inadvertently hurts himself. Personal growth, emotional growth, is affected adversely. This is especially true if an individual is not able to forgive herself for past actions. What she may have done may appear so horrible to her that no amount of therapy will convince her to forgive herself. Remember, I'm talking strictly from a social scientific standpoint here. These data are verified by rigorous research. Unless a person is able to reach the point of forgiveness, they cannot forget. If she cannot forget, that equates to carrying around harmful baggage that prevents nimble self maneuvering in daily life. I've tried to convince others, when I've engaged in counseling, to simply 'let it go' but they can't. Imagine struggling with a person who has for years never let himself forget, that due to past inability as a parent, his son committed suicide. Or what do you say to someone who, in a fit of anger, murdered his best friend? Psychologists can work for years with such a patient convinced that they have all but coaxed the patient to move on, only to find that they relapse into total disintegration. What can you say? Have you ever had some part of your past life come back to haunt you, something you aren't proud of and something others won't let you forget? Psychologists will tell you such a situation can be very difficult to resolve. And yet, resolve it the patient must, if he is to grow. I'm not going to belabor the point of importance of self concept and self esteem here. I trust most all will concede the critical need of a positive self concept to be fully functioning.

Happily the one concept that works, I have found, and works consistently is an appeal to the Christian concept of Jesus' sacrifice. I find I can appeal to this, regardless of a person's own personal religious persuasion. Again, my goal here is to explain the concept without evoking a debate over whether Jesus is the Son of God or even what it means to claim Jesus is the Son of God. That comes with further meditation and soul searching. Note, this is what Christianity can offer that few other religions can offer. Jesus, the Christ, in effect proclaimed, "I am willing to go through unspeakable suffering, martyrdom, death, to be punished for something I didn't do. And I'm willing to do this for you. I'm going to be subjected to inhuman torture and death because I'm not willing to deny truth. That's my only crime, not being willing to renounce truth, to keep quiet, nothing more." How many other martyrs have experienced a similar fate, from Biblical prophets to political martyrs even in our time? What happened to Jesus has been repeated countless times. We are all familiar with that. So it's not difficult to accept that such a fate occurred to Jesus. In fact, his followers after Jesus' death were willing to undergo the same fate rather than deny what they had personally witnessed. No more convincing proof need be offered of any event occurring than that the witnesses to the event are willing to die themselves rather than deny the facts of the event.

But here's the point of this sacrifice. Jesus said, "I am willing to suffer for you, be punished for you, tortured for you, die for you. I am willing to do this of my own volition so you can have this priceless feeling of forgiveness for yourself and as an inducement for you to forgive others. When you feel, for example, that you committed an unspeakable crime, caused another person to suffer, did something you are extremely ashamed of, follow Jesus' advice. "Jesus, in effect, said, "Ask yourself what is the worst punishment you could imagine for your crime or culpable action. Do you feel you deserve to be tortured, to undergo a slow methodical torture of unspeakable pain and torment that eventually leads to death?" Most of us would be willing to concede that such a personal ordeal might be enough to expiate one's past transgressions. However, most of us lack the courage and conviction to undergo such a punishment. Jesus said, "No matter. You don't have to subject yourselves to such agony, I did it for you! So whenever you feel down and beyond consolation and dejected, just consciously apply my agony for your agony. Don't waste what I did. Please apply it to yourself, for yourself! I've undergone the most ignominious suffering for you freely and without coercion. So when you feel you should be punished or need to atone for your errors, apply my personal suffering for yourself. I only ask that you ask forgiveness, apply my punishment for what you deserve and resolve to try to do better the next time. And be willing to forgive still others. Remember, I am willing to apply my punishment for what you feel you deserve."

This concept really works! I've had real success using this concept in my personal counseling. Furthermore, countless millions throughout history have been able to start new lives without years of therapy by first understanding the concept and being willing to impute this act of Jesus for themselves. No other

religion has such a powerful concept that can be used practically, efficiently and successfully. Other religions or non theological therapies attempt to say, “you should forgive yourself, God loves you or it wasn’t so bad what you did and I think you should forgive yourself.” But only one world view offers such a reasonable, easily understood concept to effect forgiveness. This is the beauty of Christianity. It’s practical, it works. And note, I did not appeal to the claim that Jesus is the Son of God and what that adds to the equation. There is no need to argue that issue here. It’s a matter each can individually deal with once he understands the believable, reasonable basis for being able to start a new life. I’m proud to be a Christian due to the simplicity and beauty of this solely Christian doctrine of sacrifice!

## LOVE IS NOT A TRITE IDEA

The third aspect of Christian doctrine that I wish to explore is the directive to show love to others. I must first say this is no longer a uniquely Christian practice. Those living through the 1970’s remember when psychologists and the popular media (music, books, etc.) touted the beauty of this lifestyle and the importance of love as a necessity for a psychological well adjustment. This was a Christian concept central to Christianity and stressed by Christianity more so than any other world religion. Unfortunately the data on the preeminence of “love” was so powerful it was immediately taken up but never was equated with the essence of Christianity. The revelations on love made thousands of psychologists popular and effective in therapy without any deference to Christianity. I’m saying, a conspicuous aspect of this celebration of love was that credit was seldom given to Christianity as the source of this idea. Psychologists began to present a great deal of scientific research proving the benefits to all parties from a display of true love. Countless studies verify that benefactors of love are rewarded with psychological, emotional and physiological benefits themselves. Research, however, was presented as if these were original discoveries without stating they were a restatement and verification of Judeo – Christian doctrine. Unfortunately, the ‘importance of love’ has become a trite phrase with much of the power of the Biblical directive emasculated.

The other note I hasten to make about the uniquely Christian doctrine of love is the positive connotation given to the biblical directive to love. Love means ‘doing unto others’, ‘showing love’, in an active rather than merely reactive way. It is far more than refraining from harming but includes the aspect of initiating action with the motive of benefiting others. Christian love is not the idea of ‘do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you,’ which is a passive restatement of the Golden Rule taught in some other religions. Further, other religions may acknowledge the importance of love in their dogma but never to the extent Christianity does. Christians believe ‘God is love’ or the epitome of love. The contrast is quite clear when one compares the squalor and suffering in third-world, non-Christian countries whose culture was originally based on non-Christian passive love to the conditions in countries whose laws are traditionally

based on Judeo-Christian guidelines. Of course, nominal Christian countries have not totally eradicated physical suffering but have at least made an appreciable dent in it compared to non-Christian countries. Of course, communist countries have accomplished similar feats but only with concomitant loss of freedom. Please realize I am not asserting this to start a debate to which you might take exception but only to illustrate what I mean by “active love” versus “passive love”.

I also should add that Christian Biblical writings never do give an actual definition of love. The best that it does is to either give examples of what love (the Bible uses the Greek word, “agape”, rather than simply “philos” which is ‘brotherly love’) is like; for example, the freely given sacrifice of Jesus’ own life or the unselfish sharing of physical needs by early Christians even when they had barely enough to survive themselves. The Bible also in attempting to illustrate the magnitude of true love gives an elaborate list of what love is ‘not’. The apostle Paul said love, “does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-6 in the Bible) Recognizing that any definition of love only serves to limit the magnitude of this value, I still like to say, “Love is an unselfish concern for others backed by positive action to help, but much more.” When I hear of the ‘good’ being done in the name of love and the positive contributions to humanity of countless present and past Christians like Mother Theresa, I’m humbled and proud to be a Christian.

## MY CONCLUSIONS

Let me say it again, I’m proud to be a Christian. I daily reap the benefits of being a Christian. Three major tenets of Christian doctrine (there may be more but these three are shared by all who claim to be Christians) give me a starting point or foundation from which to build my life. I believe in a God, a higher power, that is the reference point for all reality. This source, as science has shown, is the beginning of all reality and therefore is the reference point from which all reality can be gauged. Knowing that life was shared with me or that I am one of the products of the universal beginning, I am not without direction for my life.

The universe is expanding, there are endless opportunities. That’s a basis for optimism, hope for the future, a better world. This, in fact, is the spirit of Christianity – a spirit of optimism, always recognizing improvement is possible, improvement for my society, improvement for me and those around me. That makes life exciting and interesting. I fervently hope you, too, can catch the excitement of Christianity. As Jesus said, “All things are possible for those who believe”. (Mark 9:23 in the Bible) This is another discovery of modern psychology that has been employed for thousands of years in Christianity and it’s antecedents. The power of the mind, but that’s another chapter to explore in Christian doctrine. I’ve lived that way for many years. I believe what Jesus said,

“All things are possible for those who believe”. I’ve witnessed seeming miracles in my life, countless miracles by insisting on living in a hopeful, optimistic manner.

A Christian recognizes all people live by faith. We all make assumptions about life and live based on those assumptions. We can assume life has arisen from nothingness (of course, you have to admit there was a beginning from all the scientific evidence) and will progress (again, that’s an assumption of most atheists too, that we can make progress) only where nothingness can lead. And now that intelligence has some how, by chance surfaced in the universe, we have faith that a positive future is possible. That takes an awful lot of faith in my estimation. The other alternative takes faith too, but in my estimation, far less blind faith. We know the universe and life had a beginning, we know life shows evidence of intelligent design. The step to believe in a higher power takes faith, but no where near the faith needed to believe in the power of Nothingness. We know that recent social scientific research has affirmed repeatedly the traditional values associated with a belief in a higher power. The importance for social well being of love, forgiveness, optimism, goal-orientation, a grounding in values have not been diminished but affirmed. All these confirmations make it much easier to take the Christian “Leap of Faith” rather than the Nothingness “Leap of Faith.”

Once, as a young man, I was naïve enough to accept the challenge of the Biblical prophet who claimed to speak from God, “Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”(Malachi 3:10 in the Bible)” I took the challenge, I tested the Christian way of life. It’s all come to pass beyond my fondest expectations. The wishes, the dreams, the hopes and an exciting, stimulating life have followed. I testify to this for several reasons. First, I want to make it clear that though I may have started out with a motive of personal gain, over time I found that motive has subtly been transformed into a concern for others, too. I can predict that if you are in need of something better for your life and you are willing to take my invitation, you will undergo the same transformation I did. Your motive may very well be a seemingly selfish motive of a better life, you’ll get that but somewhere down the road you’ll notice a subtle change. Once you’ve been satisfied with the true peace of mind you have always cherished but didn’t realize was missing, you’ll want to see others satisfied too.

## THE CHALLENGE

So this takes me to the greatest proof of the veracity of the Christian philosophy that I can offer. It works! I realize I’ve proved it to myself but not to you. I insist, though, your making the effort will prove to be the greatest proof to you. The nineteenth century Danish philosopher called it, “the Leap of Faith”. I know that every person who has been a Christian for any appreciable length of time that I’ve interviewed says the same thing. The greatest proof that there is a God or

that Christianity is a meaningful way of life is that it works. Ultimately, the happiness, the peace of mind, the inner-tranquility is my personal proof I've chosen the correct course. I challenge you to take the same challenge I did years ago. "Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (The Bible again) I'm confident you'll find, as I did, the optimistic promise of Jesus will be confirmed for you that, "All things are possible for those who believe."

Questions or comments, contact Paul Serwinek,  
248-685-1299 or [pserwinek@comcast.net](mailto:pserwinek@comcast.net)

P.S. If you need help in taking the very simple step to becoming a Christian, or affirming your Christian heritage, contact any Christian church that teaches the Bible as the Word of God. They will be delighted to help you start your journey to fulfillment.